

Government Orders

I wonder if the member could take a moment to confirm my understanding, which is that on June 27 we created the special committee and for the next three months it acted as a post box. The initiative of the government pursuant to the McGrath recommendations on parliamentary reform was to make use of a special committee so that the bill could be redrafted in a major sense including in terms of the principles.

We have discussed this in committee and in terms of the witnesses we will call. It has been our intention to redraft the legislation dramatically because, as the hon. member knows, we have heard from FEARO. They have indicated that more than 100 acts of Parliament ultimately will be included in the legislation. Surely that should be in the legislation. The projects that are to be exempted are not listed; surely, they need to be listed. The regulations in the legislation are not listed; surely they should be. The mandatory inclusion projects are not listed, and they should be. Even intervenor funding is not listed.

I wonder if the member could take a moment to explain to the House his understanding of the process that was intended by having this bill go to a special committee before it goes to a legislative committee. This piece of legislation is described universally by serious environmentalists in this country as a legislative Swiss cheese where the holes are larger than the cheese. I am sure the member knows that we want to make this a good piece of legislation so that future generations can look back and say that the men and women in this Parliament knew what they were doing and knew what kinds of projects should be assessed and how they should be assessed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Skeena for his question. As for his desire or intent to bring changes, amendments or that sort of things, I think the hon. member will understand that that is part of the legislative process, which is to say that after the legislation is approved on second reading and sent to a legislative committee, the hon. member will be allowed to propose changes and amendments he feels right and relevant during the committee proceedings.

In the other part of his question, the hon. member compares the legislation to Swiss cheese. I want to point

out, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying a moment ago in my speech, that the Dutch government, which is recognized as a leader in the environmental assessment area, recently wrote to the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office saying that from an analysis of the reform proposed in Bill C-78 they felt we surpassed them in that area. So, we might be eating better Swiss cheese than the Dutchmen.

Nothing is perfect in this world, but Dutchmen are recognized as experts in the area of environmental assessment. And they are the ones who sent us a letter telling us that we have a good legislation, that we are surpassing them and becoming international leaders in the environmental assessment area.

So I feel this legislation is not that bad. But the hon. member has of course every right to find deficiencies in it. Nothing is perfect. On the other hand, I think the hon. member may use all those ideas and suggestions to propose changes or amendments during the committee proceedings after second reading approval.

Mr. Gabriel Desjardins (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, my first words are to commend our colleague from Terrebonne for the excellent speech he has just made on an excessively important piece of legislation for Canada. The hon. member has shown great concern for the environment, Mr. Speaker, and I know for a fact that the people of Abitibi—Témiscamingue are also very interested in environmental issues.

You may or may not know this, Mr. Speaker, but the residents of Abitibi—Témiscamingue have witnessed anarchic industrial development in the last 50 years. Our environment has been marred to the extent that bills like this one take on a special meaning for us. You can readily appreciate the fact that had this kind of process been in place 50 years ago we would not be coping with the environmental problems we have now. This exemplifies the kind of leadership our government has shown since 1984. Given the legislation this Progressive Conservative government has enacted since then, it is clear that it is fully conscious of environmental issues.

Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from Terrebonne. Considering that this bill will have a tremendous impact on the environment, to what extent does this important measure differ from regulations dating back to 1984? Can he point out the difference to show how much further this bill goes?